

Information Sheet

Organic beekeeping

Principles:

According to the EU Organic Regulation the following principles apply to organic beekeeping: Husbandry practices must be friendly to bees; attention must be paid to hygiene. Breeds adapted to the sites are used. Only adequate sites for the beehives have to be chosen. Great attention shall be paid to prevention of diseases. In case of diseases only allowed remedies are used. The same counts for disinfection and cleaning. At the end of the production season hives shall be left with sufficient reserves of honey and pollen to survive the winter. Feeding is only allowed with organic feeding stuff. Mutilation such as clipping the wings of queen bees is prohibited.

Detailed provisions:

Materials for beehives

The hives shall be made basically of natural materials presenting no risk of contamination to the environment or the apiculture products (eg untreated wood and straw, clay). No restrictions whatsoever regard other elements, e.g. connecting elements, feeding equipment, roof coverings.

Inside the hive only propolis, wax and plant oils are allowed. For exterior painting it is only allowed to use products not causing residues in products or bees. This has to be ensured by the operator.

Wax

Beeswax for new wax foundations must come from organic apiaries.

Cleaning

For cleaning and disinfection of materials, buildings, fittings, tools and products used in bee keeping the following substances are allowed only:

potassium and sodium soap	natural essences of plants
water and steam	alcohol
lime /milk of lime	formaldehyde
quicklime	sodium carbonate
sodium hypochlorite (e.g. as liquid bleach)	hydrogen peroxide
caustic soda	caustic potash
citric acid, per acetic acid, formic acid, lactic acid, oxalic acid, acetic acid	

In addition, sodium hydroxide is allowed for cleaning and disinfecting frames, hives and honeycombs. Physical treatments for disinfection of apiaries such as steam or direct flame are permitted.

Origin of Bees and renovation of apiaries:

In the choice of breeds or strains, account shall be taken of the capacity of animals to adapt to local conditions, their vitality and their resistance to disease.

Preference shall be given to the use of *Apis mellifera* and their local ecotypes. If purchase of bees is necessary, organic bees have to be bought. For the renovation of apiaries, 20 % per year of the queen bees and swarms may be replaced by non-organic queen bees and swarms in the organic production unit provided that the queen bees and swarms are placed in hives with combs or comb foundations coming from organic production units.

Siting of apiaries

Apiaries shall be placed in areas that provide within a radius of 3 km nectar and pollen sources consisting essentially of organically produced crops or, as appropriate, of spontaneous vegetation or non-organically managed forests or crops that are only treated with low environmental impact methods. Apiaries shall be kept at sufficient distance from sources that may lead to the contamination of beekeeping products or to the poor health of the bees (e.g. rural areas, motorways, industrial sites, landfill sites, waste incinerators). The beekeeper must take appropriate precautions to avoid contamination.

Feeding

Feeding is only permitted where the survival of the hives is endangered due to climatic conditions. In that case organic honey, organic sugar syrups or organic sugar is allowed. Pollen substitutes are not allowed. Records have to be kept regards feeding (type of feedingstuff, date of feeding, amount and relevant hives).

Pest control and disease prevention

Vitality and self-healing power must be maintained and supported. If despite all preventive measures the colonies become sick or infested, they shall be treated immediately and, if necessary, the colonies can be placed in isolation apiaries. In case of intervention biological and biotechnological measures have to be preferred. To prevent frames, hives and combs from pests only substances allowed for pest control in organic plant production are to be used (list of allowed substances see Reg. EU 2018/848, its Deleg. and Impl. Regulations).

To date only the following substances are used in practice:

Bacillus thuringiensis: as insecticide
Sulphur: as fungicide, acaricide, repellent

Rodenticides are only allowed if used in traps.

Veterinary medicinal products may be used in organic beekeeping in so far as the corresponding use is authorised in the Member State in accordance with the relevant Community provisions or national provisions in conformity with Community law.

If a treatment is applied with chemically synthesised allopathic products, during such a period, the colonies treated shall be placed in isolation apiaries and all the wax shall be replaced with wax coming from organic beekeeping. Subsequently, the conversion period of one year will apply to those colonies.

Varroa-control:

In cases of infestation with *Varroa destructor* only the following substances may be used

oxalic acid lactic acid acetic acid formic acid
menthol thymol eukalyptol camphor

No new conversion if these substances are used.

The practice of destroying the male brood is permitted only to isolate the infestation of *Varroa destructor*.

Input Material

At any purchase of organic products (e.g. wax, feedingstuff, bees) the recent organic certificate must be required from the seller. The goods must be declared in an accurate way on the invoice/accompanying documents.

Records

Records are central for organic bee keeping. On the one hand they show important information for the beekeeper, on the other hand they are an indispensable means for the organic inspection.

Records must contain:

- purchase of bees and wax, feedingstuff ...
- use of veterinary medication/animal treatment/products against *Varroa* ...
- sales and processing ...

Special records regarding beekeeping must contain:

- colony management
- feeding
- harvests (honey, pollen...)
- cleaning/disinfection
- transhumance

A site plan listing the location of hives shall be provided and shall be kept updated. These maps must show the flight radius of 3 km around each apiary site. Please select a scale for the site plans, which allows a representation of the 3 km radius.

All records must be kept up to date and ready for the organic inspection at any time.

Conversion:

Conversion starts on the date of signing the inspection contract. The provisions must be kept for at least 1 year. Only after at least one year conversion period and a negative wax sample products can be labelled as organic.

Please be aware that in case of animal products there are no „in-conversion products“. Therefore there is nothing like “in-conversion honey” or “in-conversion mead”.

Wax:

During the conversion period the wax shall be replaced with wax coming from organic beekeeping. If not available residue free wax, proven by a negative analytical test, can be used. In case residue free wax is already used demonstrably, changing of wax is not obligatory. In any case, before the end of the 12 month conversion period a wax sample will be taken by Austria Bio Garantie and sent to an accredited lab.

If the result shows no residues, bees and their products will be certified organic 12 month after signing of the inspection contract and can be sold as such.

If you have any questions, please contact your inspection body.